



Framing a theory-grounded research agenda related to communities

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Conference track: Contexts and methods: Theoretical and conceptual frameworks, research designs, and methodological issues

Format: Symposium

Summary

This symposium is one of five sessions in a series on framing a research agenda in multiple arenas: students, faculty, institutions, communities, and partnerships. Drawing on *Research on Service Learning: Conceptual Frameworks and Assessment* (Clayton, Bringle, & Hatcher, in press), we will discuss theories relevant to research related to community outcomes and community organization capacity, critique previous research in this arena, and collaboratively generate recommendations for practice and future research.

Bob Bringle will open the session by inviting collaborative critique of research related to communities. Bringle will share a model for conceptualizing research in terms of the convergence of theory, design, practice, and measurement (Bringle, Clayton, & Hatcher, in press) and will facilitate discussion of his

colleagues' work accordingly.

Roger Reeb will argue that there is a significant lack of research exploring community outcomes of service learning, representing an important void in the literature. The Psycho-Ecological Systems Model (PESM) (Reeb & Folger, 2010; Reeb et al., 2011a, 2011b) that he will share is a conceptual framework for investigating community impact. It integrates three theoretical developments: ecological systems models (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), biopsychosocial models (Kiesler, 2000), and contemporary conceptualizations of interaction. PESH focuses researchers' attention on a wide variety of intervention targets and community outcomes across interrelated systems. A research agenda framed by PESH will be outlined.

Laura Littlepage will address research on service learning from the perspective of organizational and managerial capacity, particularly volunteer management capacity (VMC; Hager & Brudney, 2004a, 2004b; Gazley, Littlepage, & Myers, 2007; Littlepage, Gazley, & Bennett, 2012): how agencies are structured to involve students as volunteers and how effectively they work with students and faculty. Service learning students can present additional benefits but also additional challenges to partner organizations, compared to traditional volunteers. The question of whether communities have the capacity to engage students has great theoretical and practical value. A research agenda framed in terms of organizational capacity will be outlined.

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